

Christopher O'Brien, Committee Clerk

To the House Finance Committee:

I am a landlord who supports H-8000, the Reduced Housing Rent Pilot Program.

And I have a terrible story to share with you.

As a landlord, I always followed the laws that allowed me to raise rent with little notice and evict tenants when they couldn't pay. I'd like to tell you about one particular tenant.

This tenant, Miguel, was late with the rent. I always took my property manager's advice about what to charge for rent. We had raised his rent with 30 day's notice. And when he was late with his rent – he couldn't afford the increase and couldn't find another place in time, we started his eviction. All of this is legal in Rhode Island.

Compared to other states, in Rhode Island it's easy to raise the rent on a tenant and then evict a tenant for non-payment. So, as I had done before, I made one phone call to my property manager to evict him and he did the rest. It was a simple, quick process.

I didn't have to go to court, didn't have to talk with a lawyer, didn't even have to go to the apartment. I just paid my property manager \$500.00 and that was that. The eviction was served and the tenant was forced out on a snowy, bitterly cold day in February. Done. I didn't think much about it, and just figured my former tenant had a place to go.

A week later he died in an unheated garage. He had nowhere to go.

The realization of this hit me hard. I felt terrible guilt. I tried to justify my actions. A tenant didn't pay his rent, so I just followed the laws that allowed me to do this. And it was easy. And quick. I had that unit re-rented in a week or two.

But someone had died. And I have to live with the realization that my actions -- my completely legal actions – had this consequence. But sometimes laws are unjust.

H 8000 would provide much-needed funds to landlords to supplement their rent, and provide some relief for tenants. This bill would help tenants and landlords alike.

I wish every day since he died that I had done more for Miguel, instead of treating him as another tenant late with the rent. After all, I was just following the law.

Please pass this bill. And please remember that for many, these are more than finance decisions: lives depend on it.

Gerry Willis

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